

Thinking Ecology: Re-Envisioning the Environmental Crisis

“Imagine sailing out of the sight of land and looking out in all directions. Everywhere, we see the vastness of nature, causing us to sense our own insignificance in the midst of the ocean. Most people would agree that this sensation is part of our response to beauty; a reflection of our aesthetic sensibility. Does this spontaneous reaction to the natural world imply that we have a moral obligation to nature? Until recent times such a question would be on the periphery of philosophical investigation and religious belief and practice. Now ‘do humans have a responsibility towards nature?’ has become the most urgent question of our time.”

So begins Shimer Professor Harold Stone’s course description of the capstone course for Shimer’s Environmental Studies concentration, Thinking Ecology: Re-Envisioning the Environmental Crisis. The course examines the major strands of the philosophic, scientific, and religious traditions that have contributed to current thinking about the environment and conservation. Starting with readings from Darwin, the course builds to a specific problem or issue in contemporary ecology and evolutionary theory. Students study religious and philosophic traditions and participate in practica that let students engage hands-on with the local study of ecology, conservation and preservation.

Thinking Ecology will be offered once each academic year, with the pilot planned for Spring 2009. The course content will change according to the focus selected for each semester, and may thus be taken for credit more than once. Example foci include environmental ethics and local politics, ecological science, the American conservation movement, and Darwin and evolutionary theory.

Strachan Donnelley, President of the Center for Humans and Nature <http://www.humansandnature.org/>, has made a strong commitment to the development of this and other environmental studies courses at Shimer. We are currently seeking funding to underwrite an additional public lecture series component of the course. If you are interested in assisting us in this effort, please contact **John Meech**.